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C O N F I D E N T I A L FREETOWN 000122

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDING SIPDIS CAPTION)

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/21/2017

TAGS: GV PREL SL LI

SUBJECT: TFG01: SIERRA LEONE ISSUES STATEMENT ON GUINEA

REF: (A) STATE 19838 (B) FREETOWN 112 (C) CONAKRY 160

Classified By: DCM E. Susie Pratt, Reasons 1.4 B/D

¶1. (C) Summary: Presentation of Ref A demarche requesting a Sierra Leonean statement on Guinea to President Kabbah's private secretary on February 20 and to the Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the following day was overtaken by the Sierra Leonean and Liberian Presidents' visit to Conakry on February 20. A statement issued by Kabbah's office on February 21 said that Guinea President Conte promised the visiting Presidents that he would dialogue with the labor unions and civil society and offer names for a new Prime Minister within two weeks. MFA DG Wurie commented to the Ambassador that Conte is well known for making promises that he has no intention of keeping as has been the case in the Yenga dispute between Sierra Leone and Guinea.  
End Summary.

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Meeting with the MFA  
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¶2. (C) Ambassador and DCM met with Sierra Leone Ministry of Foreign Affairs DG Ambassador Umaru Wurie on February 21 to deliver demarche (Ref A), along with a copy of the February 16 U.S. Press Statement (Ref C) and to inquire about the result of the joint visit by Sierra Leone President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to Guinea to meet with President Conte. Minister Koroma, who had accompanied them on the visit, was unavailable as he was departing to do some "politicking" up country with SLPP Presidential hopeful, Vice President Solomon Berewa.

¶3. (C) Wurie had not been specifically informed of the outcome of the meeting, but noted that in accordance with the demarche request, Sierra Leone was planning to issue a Press Release on the visit itself. (Note: Embassy Freetown obtained a copy of the release after the visit. It appears in full. Para 7, below). Wurie confirmed that Kabbah had returned to Sierra Leone early in the afternoon of February 20. Wurie commented that it would be likely that Conte would respond favorably to their visit, but in the end would pursue his own agenda. Conte, he said, is "like Charles Taylor" who was notorious for accepting advice and direction, but "afterwards doing what he wanted." For example, Wurie pointed out Conte's failed promises over the Yenga border dispute between Guinea and Sierra Leone.

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Kabbah's Private Secretary Views on Guinea  
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¶4. (C) On February 20, Ambassador and DCM met over lunch with Sheka Mansaray, who has been President Kabbah's private secretary for ten years. During the lunch Ambassador

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delivered Ref A demarche and press statement. At the time of the meeting, Mansaray was not sure of the specific message Kabbah and Sirleaf were delivering to Conte that day. Interestingly, only the day before, Monday, February 19, Mansaray had told the Ambassador that Kabbah would not go to Guinea, because the situation "was evolving." Apparently President Sirleaf changed Kabbah's mind. Mansaray agreed that it was time for Conte to leave office, echoing Kabbah's views as reported Ref B. Conte's best option, he said, would be for a dignified retirement, since he is no longer capable of governing. He did not think Conte would seek refuge in another country.

¶5. (C) In response to the Ambassador's query, Mansaray confirmed that President Kabbah had met with Aicha Conneh over the past weekend. He said the subject of that meeting was closely held and Kabbah was not sharing the contents with anyone.

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Discussion with Liberian Ambassador to Sierra Leone  
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¶6. (C) Earlier on February 21, DCM spoke with Liberian Ambassador Thomas Brima who thought that the Kabbah-Sirleaf visit to Conte had gone well. He said Conte appeared willing to listen to requests that he include civil society in a dialogue to move beyond the current crisis and spoke to him about the need for change, but did not know whether he would actually follow that advice. According to the Liberian Ambassador, neither Kabbah nor Sirleaf (at least publicly) went so far as to encourage Conte to step down. They did imply to him, if they did not explicitly say it, that Conte could no longer govern effectively and should listen to the legitimate concerns of the Guinean people. The Liberian Ambassador added that Kabbah and Sirleaf told Conte that Sierra Leone and Liberia are transforming democratically, and in the interest of Mano River regional security and growth, it is time for Guinea to transform itself as well.

¶7. (U) Late on February 21, The Office of the President issued a Press Release on the visit. The release, the full text of which appears below, highlighted a positive outcome from the "one day consultative summit" with Presidents Conte, Sirleaf and Kabbah. It underscored Conte's promise to engage civil society on the way forward and to solicit names for a new Prime Minister. The release noted that Sirleaf and Kabbah had promised to uphold the security protocols of the Mano River Union in the event of incursions into Guinea from neighboring countries.

Begin Text of Press Release:

Sierra Leone Government Office of the President: Press Release, Wednesday, 21st February 2007

On Tuesday the 20th of February 2007, President Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of the Republic of Sierra Leone and President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of the Republic of Liberia held a one-day consultative Summit with the President of the Republic of Guinea, General Lansana Conte in Conakry.

It will be recalled that about a month ago, the Trade Union Movement in the Republic of Guinea called for a strike action against the Government. That strike action has developed into an ugly confrontation between Government security forces and the general public resulting in several deaths.

Although attempts have been made in order to have a peaceful resolution of the problem, there seems to be an impasse. The objective of the visit of the two Presidents was therefore to have a first hand account of the situation in Guinea from President Lansana Conte and to discuss with him how to resolve the impasse.

President Lansana Conte expressed gratitude to the visiting

Presidents for the concern expressed by them and for the offer of assistance to him. He informed them that he had made efforts to meet part of the demands of the Trade Union Movement by appointing a new Prime Minister. This however does not seem to satisfy the Trade Union Movement and hence the impasse.

Notwithstanding, he however expressed the desire to move the process forward promising that in two weeks time he would come up with a new decision to address the impasse.

Meanwhile, he was extending an invitation through the two Presidents to the Trade Union Movement and the Civil Society of Guinea to make suggestions on the way forward including possible names for consideration for the position of a new Prime Minister, to engage him to reach a decision that will be acceptable too all Guineans

While President Kabbah was briefing journalists about the outcome of their visit to Guinea, one of the journalists enquired about news of further deterioration of security in the country including possible incursion of rebels from neighboring countries.

In response, the two Presidents assured the Guinean people of their readiness at all times to activate and collaborate with Guinean authorities in the implementation of the Security Protocols of the Mano River Union in order to maintain security and preserve the territorial integrity of Guinea and their own countries.

End text of Press Release.  
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